

School of Theology at Claremont



1001 1314122

BJ
1681
P25
1891



The Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT

WEST FOOTHILL AT COLLEGE AVENUE
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA

BJ.
1081
PQ5
1891

283

THE

GLORY OF THE IMPERFECT

AN ADDRESS

GIVEN AT THE FIRST COMMENCEMENT OF THE WOMAN'S
COLLEGE OF WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY,
CLEVELAND, OHIO, 1891

BY

PROFESSOR GEORGE HERBERT PALMER
OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY

(FROM STENOGRAPHER'S NOTES, REVISED BY THE AUTHOR.)

BOSTON, U.S.A.

D. C. HEATH & CO., PUBLISHERS
1891

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

COPYRIGHT, 1891,
By D. C. HEATH & CO.

TYPGRAPHY BY J. S. CUSHING & Co., BOSTON, U.S.A.
PRESSWORK BY BERWICK & SMITH, BOSTON, U.S.A.

THE GLORY OF THE IMPERFECT.

MR. PRESIDENT, STUDENTS, AND FRIENDS OF THE WOMAN'S COLLEGE:—

You will not expect an oration from me. It is not the habit of professors to pronounce orations; our work is rather to explain matters. As students of an older growth, we have learned our hard lessons, and we come to our classes to explain them. I wish this afternoon to explain a few simple matters to you.

I suppose many of you who are going out into the world will need to know, and will learn by hard experience if you do not know already, lessons which are also, as it seems to me, peculiarly appropriate to an institution just beginning its career. A few years ago Mr. Matthew Arnold, the eminent English critic, after travelling in this country and revising the somewhat unfavorable opinion he had formed of us at a distance, still wrote in his last paper on "Civiliza-

tion in the United States," that America, in spite of its excellences, is an uninteresting land. He declared that our institutions are remarkable. He pointed out how close a fit exists between the institutions of this country and the character of its citizens—so close a fit as is hardly to be found in other countries. He saw much that is of exceeding promise in our future; but after all, he asserts that no man will live in America if he can live elsewhere, because the country is an uninteresting country.

It seems to me that this remark of Mr. Arnold's is one which we may well ponder. As I consider how many of you are preparing to go forth and live in this country, I ask myself whether you must find your days uninteresting days. I am sure you have not been finding your days uninteresting here. Where were college days ever uninteresting? It is a beautiful circumstance that, the world over, the period of youthful education is the period of romance. Was ever such a thing heard of as a college student who did not enjoy himself, a college student who was not full of hope? And if this has been the case with us dull males of the past, what must be the experience of your own hopeful sex? I am sure you must be looking forward with

eagerness to your work. Is it to be blighted? Are you to find your lives dull? It might seem from the remark of Mr. Arnold that it necessarily would be so; for you must live in an uninteresting land.

When this remark of Mr. Arnold's was made, there went up a chorus from all parts of our country that Mr. Arnold did not know what he was talking about. As a stupid Englishman he had come here and failed to see what our land contains. In point of fact, every corner of it is stuffed with that beauty and distinction which he had denied. For that was the damaging part of his statement; he had said in substance: "*America is uninteresting, because the chief sources of human interest are beauty and distinction. America is not beautiful. Its scenery, its people, its past, are not distinguished. And how is it possible, therefore, for an eager, intelligent man to find an interest here?*" The usual reply to these crushing charges of Mr. Arnold was this: "*America is beautiful, America is distinguished.*" Now, on the face of the matter one might well distrust this answer. Mr. Arnold is not a man likely to make such a mistake. His life has been passed in criticism. It must be rather his standards, it seems to me, than his facts, which are at fault. Many of us

would be slow to believe our teacher had made an error in observation ; for to many of us, I am sure to many of you, he has been a great teacher. Through him we have learned the charm of simplicity, we have learned the beauty of excellent form, we have learned calmness in trial, ability to wait when in doubt ; we have, in short, learned dignity, and he who teaches us dignity is not a man soon to be forgotten or distrusted. I say, therefore, that this answer to Mr. Arnold that he was in error, that beauty and distinction are here, was one which on its face it would be prudent to distrust.

But for other reasons than these prudential ones, I incline to agree with Mr. Arnold's opinion. Even though I were not on *a priori* grounds disposed to credit his judgment, I should say he here tells me what I have myself observed. As I travel in distant lands I think I find beauty more abundant than I do in America. Certainly the distinguished objects, the distinguished persons, whom I go there to see, are more numerous than those I might seek out here. I cannot believe this part of Mr. Arnold's statement can be impugned. And must it then be that we are to accept his conclusion, and agree that your lives, while sheltered in this interesting college, are them-

selves interesting; but that when you go out, the romance is to pass away? I do not believe it, because I question the standard which Mr. Arnold has employed. He tells us that the sources of the interesting are beauty and distinction. I doubt it. I see that these may furnish a certain subordinate basis of interest; I do not believe that they are the chief source of the interests of life. And I think one must be struck with this fact: Mr. Arnold can hardly have reached his conclusion by an inductive process. He cannot have examined facts when he formed his opinion; for there is a certain class in every community whose business it is to discover what people regard as interesting. They are the newspaper editors; they are paid to find out the interesting things of life. There is nothing they would like better than to get hold of any matter that is interesting. Are they searchers for beauty and distinction? I should say not. When I take up my morning paper, what are the subjects which these hired seekers after interesting things have printed there? I find an account of disturbances in South America. I find another about Mr. Blaine's health. I find a report of a prize fight. I find speculations about the next political election. I find a description

of a fashionable marriage. These things interest me, and I suspect they interest the majority of the readers of that paper; and yet they can hardly be called beautiful or distinguished. It seems to me, therefore, that if Mr. Arnold had turned to the actual sources of interest as they exist to-day, he would hardly have considered that all the interests of life are to be found in beauty and distinction.

And yet I suppose you will feel it would be better if the trivial matters of which I have spoken as exciting our interest in the morning journal were of a more beautiful, of a more distinguished sort. Our interests would be more honorable then. These things interest because they are facts; they do not interest because they are beautiful. A fact has an interest, because it is a fact, and this commonest of interests Mr. Arnold has overlooked; he has not perceived that life itself is its own greatest interest.

But what, precisely, does he mean by beauty? What is distinction in his terminology? Let us analyze it a little; let us see if we can detect why the beautiful and the distinguished are interesting, and still how we can provide a place for the other interests which are omitted in his statement. When you look at a tree and ask yourself why that tree is

more beautiful than another, would it not be on some such grounds as these: the total bunch of branches and leaves, that exquisite green mass sunning itself, is no larger than can well be supported on the brown trunk? It is large enough; there is nothing deficient. Smaller, it would seem the office of the trunk were hardly fulfilled; larger, the trunk would be overpowered by it. Those branches which extend themselves to the right exquisitely balance those which are extended to the left. As you scrutinize it, you find that every leaf is in order, each one ready to aërate its little sap, and so to conduce to the life of the whole. There is no decay, no broken branch; nothing is lacking, but at the same time there is nothing superfluous. Each part ministers to every other part. In all its parts the tree is proportionate; it is beautiful, inherently beautiful, because it is unsuperfluous, unlacking.

And when you turn to other larger, more intricately beautiful objects, do you not find the same principle involved,—that the fulness of relations among the parts, the perfection of the organism, the absence of incongruity,—that it is this which constitutes the beauty of the object? Were you ever in Wiltshire in England, and did you visit the splendid

seat of the Earls of Pembroke, Wilton House, a magnificent pile, erected before Elizabeth began to reign, designed by Holbein the painter? Its walls, now gray, accord well with the ancient trees that surround it; its green lawns, prepared ages ago, were adapted to their positions and perform the same services to-day. Its gardens through the course of time have become only more exquisite than they formerly were. As one looks on the outward aspect of this stately dwelling, one imagines that the Creator himself must have had it in mind in the design of the spot. And when you enter, all is as congruous. You go into the great statuary gallery, out of which open the several halls. As you pass through them, you find the portraits, not only of the immediate members of the family in the past,—men who have been among the most distinguished of England's worthies,—but also portraits of the eminent friends of the Pembrokes, painted by the most notable of artists, who were often themselves also friends of the family. Here in the library is shown you Sidney's "Arcadia," written in this very garden, with a lock of Elizabeth's hair enclosed. In the great hall a play of Shakespeare's was brought out for the first time. Such are the intellectual glories of the place. As you pass

from room to room, amazed at the wealth, you perceive that all is maintained at the same high level. Chancing to look from a window, you see an enchanting view: in the distance, past the cedars, the spire of Salisbury cathedral, one of the most peaceful and aspiring in England. All parts—scenery, buildings, rich possessions, historic heritages—minister to parts; romantic imagination is stirred. Nothing here which does not belong to the high region of romance. It is beautiful, beautiful beyond what America can show.

And if you turn to that region where beauty rises to a yet greater height, if you turn to human character, do you not find the same results? What is the character which has impressed you most with its beauty? Is it not that which has the full command of its powers, so that every ability finds its appropriate place without prominence; one with no false humility and without self-assertion, a character which cannot be overthrown by the petty circumstances of the day, but, steadfast in itself, has all its functions aiding one another, no part lacking, no part superfluous? When we behold such a man as this, we say: "This is what I would be; this represents the goal toward which I would tend." This man, like Wilton House, like the beautiful tree, is a finished thing. It is true

when we turn our attention back once more and criticise, we perceive that it is not so. No human character can be finished. It is its glory that it cannot be. It must ever press forward ; each step reached is but the vantage-ground for a further step. There is no completeness in human character — in human characters save one.

And must we, then, deny to human character an interest ? Perhaps we ought, according to Mr. Arnold's standard. But does not this very case bring out the narrowness of his standard ? He is conscious that beauty constitutes one of our higher interests ; it certainly cannot constitute our only, or our highest, interest, because in human life completeness of parts, that which constitutes beauty, is never reached. There must obviously be another source of interest. And is that source of interest to be found where awhile ago I sketched it, in the mere occurrence of a fact ? Shall we say every event that occurs is alike of interest ? Certainly not. Some events are of consequence, others are not of consequence. We must rate their worth, if we are to find an intelligent interest. I agree, accordingly, with Mr. Arnold in recognizing that it is the passion for perfection, the assessment of worths, which is at the

root of true interest. But I believe that in the history of the world, this passion for perfection, this deepest root of human interests, has taken two forms. The Greek conceived it in one way, the Christian has conceived it in another. It was the office of that wonderful people, the Greeks, to teach us to honor completeness, the majesty of the rounded whole. We see this in every department of their marvellous life. Whenever you look at a Greek statue, it seems to you impossible that it should be otherwise without loss ; you could not imagine any portion of it being changed ; it has reached its completeness. You can only bow ; you can rest there. Is it not so when you look at Greek architecture ? Do you not find there the same ordered proportion, the same adjustment of part to part ? And if you turn to Greek literature, it is not less marvellous. What page of Sophocles could be stricken out ? what page, what sentence ? Just enough, not more than enough ! It has grown, it has asserted its entirety ; and when that entirety has been reached, it has stopped, delighted with its own perfection. A splendid ideal, an ideal which never can fail, I am sure, to interest man as long as he remains intelligent.

And yet this beautiful Greek work shows only one

aspect of the world. It omitted one slight fact,—it omitted formative life. Joy in growth, joy in birth, delight in beginning, interest in origins,—these things did not belong to the Greek; they came in with Christianity. It is Jesus Christ who turns our attention toward the beginning, who teaches us to delight in the imperfect, rather than in the perfect. It is he who, wishing to give to his disciples a model of that which they should be, does not select the perfected man, but takes the little child and sets him before them, and to the supercilious says, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.” It is the beginning of things which he has taught us to reverence. And at first it might well appear that this reverence for the imperfect was a retrogression. What! is not a consummate man more splendid than a child? “No,” Jesus answered; and because he answered so, pity was born. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, I think we may say that the sick, the afflicted, the child — shall I not say the woman? — were hardly understood. It is because God has come down from heaven, manifesting himself in forms of imperfection, it is on that account that our intellectual horizon has been enlarged. We may now delight in the lowly, we may stoop and gather up

the imperfect things, and rejoice in them,—rejoice beyond the old Greek rejoicing.

It is, however, hard at first to see the righteousness of this. Certainly there is danger here: if we content ourselves with the imperfect rather than with the perfect, we are barbarians; we are no Christians, nor are we Greeks; we are barbarians. But that is not Jesus' spirit. He teaches us to catch the future in the instant, to see the infinite in the finite, to watch the growth of the perfect out of the imperfect. And he teaches us that this delight in progress, in growth, in aspiration, in completing, may rightly be greater than our exultation in completeness,—joy in perfecting beyond the joy of perfection.

Now I want to be sure that you young students, who are preparing yourselves here for larger life and are about to emerge into the world, get your minds turned in the right direction in regard to this matter. For though I have been discussing it, as you know is the habit of us metaphysicians, in dry and abstract fashion, I still want you to see that it is an extremely practical matter. In which direction are you going to seek the interests of your life? Are you going to demand that the things about you shall already possess their perfection? Are you going to demand

from life that it shall be completed, finished, beautiful? If so, you are doomed to unhappy days. You are certain of disappointment. Or are you going to get your intellectual eyes open, and see beauty in the making, and come to rejoice in it there, rather than after it is made? This is the question I want to present to you to-day, and I shall ask you to accompany me as we pass several of the provinces of life in survey, so that you may see how different they appear when surveyed from one of these points of view or from the other.

Whatever your professions are to be, you are all going out into homes. Undoubtedly, all of you on leaving here will go into some home, either the home of your parents, or—less fortunate—some stranger's home. And when you come there, I think I can foretell one thing: it will be a tolerably imperfect place in which you find yourself. You will notice a great many points in which it is improvable; and that is the same thing as to say you will notice a great many respects in which you could wish it otherwise. It will seem to you, I dare say, a little plain, a little commonplace, compared with your beautiful college and the college life here. I doubt whether you will find all the members of your family, dear as they

291

may be to you, as wise, as gentle-mannered, as able to contribute to your intellectual life, as are your companions here. Are you going to feel then : “ Ah ! home is a dull place ; I wish I were back in college again. I think I was made for college life. Possibly enough I was made for wealthy life ; I am sure I was made for a comfortable life ; and I do not find these things here. I will sit and wish I had them. Of course, I ought not to rejoice in a home that is short of perfection, and I recognize that this is a good way from that.” Is this going to be your attitude ? Or are you going to say : “ How interesting this home ! What an excellent struggle the dear people are making with the resources at their command ! What kindness is shown by my tired mother ; how ready to find out the many little wants of the household is she ! How diligent my father ! Should I, if I had had only their narrow opportunities, be as intelligent, as kind, as self-sacrificing as they ? What can I do to show them my gratitude ? What can I contribute towards the furtherance, the enlargement, the perfecting, of this home ? ” And, I ask, are you going to enter into this home not as a matter of loving duty, but are you going to find it interesting ? Are you going to say : “ This home is

not a perfect home, happily not a perfect home. I have something to do here. It is far more interesting than if it were already complete."

And again, when you go into the world you will not always live in places so attractive as Cleveland. I can assure you there are cities which have not your beautiful lake, your distant views, your charming houses excellently shaded with trees. These things are exceptional. You will go to places in America which will appear to you highly unfinished; it will seem to you that a great deal more might be done for them. And are you then going to say, "This place is not beautiful; and I, you know, am a lover of the beautiful. I was made for beautiful things, and how could one so superior as I rest content in such surroundings? I could not respect myself were I not discontented." Is that going to be your attitude? It is, I am sorry to think, too largely the attitude of many who go from our colleges. They have been taught to reverence perfection, they have been taught to honor excellence; and instead of making it their work to carry this excellence forth, and to be interested in spreading it far and wide in the world, they sit down and mourn that it has not yet come. How dull the world

would be had it come ! Perfection, beauty ? It constitutes the resting-place for us ; it does not constitute the working-place.

I maintain, therefore, in regard to our land as a whole, that there is no land so interesting on the face of the earth ; and I maintain this through the very reasoning which brought Mr. Arnold to a contrary opinion. I accept his judgment of the beauty of America. I accept his premise ; but I read his conclusion in just the opposite way. In America we still are making, and that is why America, beyond any other country, awakens a noble interest. The beauty which I find in the old lands, and which is refreshing to me for a season, is after all a species of death. Those who dwell among such scenes are appeased ; they are not quickened. Let them take their past ; we have our future. We may do much ; what they can do is largely ended.

In literature, I wish to bring these distinctions before you, these differences of standard, and perhaps for this purpose I cannot do better than read you a few verses from the poet of the imperfect. I suppose if we were to try to mark out with precision the work of Mr. Browning,— I mean not to mark it out as the Browning societies do, but to mark it out

with precision,—we might say that the distinctive feature of his work is that he has perceived the principle of which I am speaking; he has sought for beauty where there is seeming chaos; he has loved growth, has prized progress, has noted the advance of the spiritual, the pressing on of the finite soul through hindrance to its junction with the infinite. This it is which has inspired his somewhat crabbed verses and has made men willing to undergo the labor of reading them, that they too may partake of his insight. In one of his poems,—one which seems to me to contain some of his sublimest as well as some of his most commonplace lines, the poem on “Old Pictures in Florence,”—he discriminates between the Greek and Christian Art in much the same way I have done. I read you a few verses, that they may sum up the thoughts I have given you before I pass on.

“In Greek Art,” Mr. Browning says:—

“ You saw yourself as you wished you were,
As you might have been, as you cannot be;
Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there;
And grew content in your poor degree
With your little power, by those statues’ godhead,
And your little scope, by their eyes’ full sway,
And your little grace, by their grace embodied,
And your little date, by their forms that stay.

“ You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am ?

Even so, you will not sit like Theseus.

You would prove a model ? The son of Priam

Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use.

You're wroth — can you slay your snake like Apollo ?

You're grieved — still Niobe's the grander !

You live — there's the Racers' frieze to follow :

You die — there's the dying Alexander.

“ So, testing your weakness by their strength,

Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,

Measured by Art in your breadth and length,

You learned — to submit is a mortal's duty.

“ Growth came when, looking your last on them all,

You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day

And cried with a start — What if we so small

Be greater and grander the while than they !

Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature ?

In both, of such lower types are we

Precisely because of our wider nature ;

For time, theirs — ours, for eternity.

“ To-day's brief passion limits their range ;

It seethes with the morrow for us and more.

They are perfect — how else ? they shall never change :

We are faulty — why not ? we have time in store.

The Artificer's hand is not arrested

With us ; we are rough-hewn, no-wise polished :

They stand for our copy, and once invested

With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.”

You will notice that in this subtle study Mr. Browning points out how through the comprehension of perfection there comes content with our present lot. That I call the danger of perfection, the danger of comprehending beauty. For in the lives of all of you there should be a divine discontent; not devilish discontent, but divine discontent,—a recognition that life may be larger than you have yet attained, that you are to press beyond what you have reached, that joy lies in the future, in that which has not been found, rather than in the present which has already been grasped. And it seems to me if ever a people were called on to understand this glory of the imperfect, it is we of America, it is you of the Middle West; it is especially you who are undertaking the experiment of a woman's college. You are at the beginning, and that fact should lend an interest to your work which cannot so readily be realized in our older institutions. As you look eastward upon my own great University, Harvard University, it may be that it seems to you singularly beautiful, reverend in its age, magnificent in its endowments, equable in its working; and you contemplate it, perhaps, as nearing perfection, and contrast your own incipient college with it as hardly

244

deserving of the name. You are entirely mistaken. Harvard College, to its glory be it said, is enormously unfinished; it is a great way from perfect; it is full of blemishes. We are tinkering at it all the time; and if it were not so, I for one should decline to be connected with it: its interest for me would be lost. On the other hand, you are to start free from some trammels that we feel. Because we have so large a past laid upon us, we have not that freedom of growth, that opportunity for enlargement, which is resident with you. Accordingly, in your very experiment here you have a superb illustration of the principle I am trying to explain. This young and imperfect college should interest you who are members of it; it should interest this intelligent city. Wise patrons should find here a germ capable of a splendid and interesting growth, which may well call for their heartiest enthusiasm. I assure you that we of the East often look longingly towards you who have an untrammelled opportunity of power.

If, then, the modes of accepting the passion for perfection are so contrasted as I have pointed out, is it possible to indicate methods by which you may discipline yourselves in the nobler way of seeking the interest of life? — I mean by taking part with

things in their beginnings, learning to reverence them there, and so finding an interest perpetually supported and carried forward. You may well look with some anxiety upon the doctrine which I have laid down. You may say : "But beauty is seductive ; beauty allures me. I know that the imperfect in its struggle toward perfection is the more noble matter ; I know that America is, for him who could see all things, a more interesting land than Spain. Yes, I see it, but I find it hard to feel it. To me to lie and dream in romance, in ideal perfectness, is a thing to which I am powerfully inclined. Can you not show me by what means I may discipline myself out of this more degraded habit and into the higher life, so that I shall always be interested in progress, in the future rather than in past, in the on-going rather than in the completed life ?" I cannot give you any receipt which will be complete. It is life itself which must discipline you. You may understand what I say to-day ; you may resolve to live in the methods I am approving. But you may be very sure that to-morrow you will need to learn it all over again. And yet I think I may suggest to you several lines of discipline, as I may call them ; I may direct your

attention toward certain modes by which you can instruct yourselves how to take an interest in the imperfect thing, and still to have that interest an honorable one.

I will reduce what I have to say to three rules, and the first rule shall be—*observe!* A simple matter—one, I dare say, which it will seem to you difficult not to follow. You have a pair of eyes; how can you fail to observe? Ah, but eyes can only look; that is not observing. You want to observe, not to look only. You want to penetrate into things, to find out what is there. There is nothing on earth which, when observed, is not of enormous interest. You cannot find anything so destitute of the principles of life that when you come to study it, it will not disclose those principles to you. But it makes all the difference whether you do thus observe, whether you are willing to hold your attention to the thing in hand and see what it contains. After puzzling long about the charm of Homer, I once applied to a learned friend and said to him, “Can you tell me why Homer is so interesting? Why can’t you and I write as he wrote? Why is it that his art was lost with him, and that to-day it is impossible for us to quicken such interest as he?” “Well,” said my

friend, "I have meditated on that a great deal, but it seems to me it comes to about this: Homer looked long at a thing. Why," said he, "do you know that if you should hold up your thumb and look at it long enough, you would find it immensely interesting?" Homer looks a great while at his thumb; he sees precisely the thing he is dealing with. He does not confuse it with anything else. It is sharp to him; and because it is sharp to him it stands out sharply for us over all these thousands of years. Have you acquired that art? Do you see the thing exactly as it is? Do you strip away from it your own likings and dislikings, your own previous notions of what it ought to be? Do you come face to face with things? If you do, I am sure the hardest situation in life will be to you a delight. You will not be interested in its hardships, but in its opportunities. Possibly you will feel: "Yes, here are just the difficulties I delight to throw myself into. How can one be interested in easy things? The hard things of life are the ones for which we ought to give thanks." So you will feel, if you observe, if you put yourself into your situation and understand it on all sides. Why, the things on which we have thus concentrated attention become our interests. For example, un-

luckily when I was trained I was not disciplined in Botany. I cannot observe the rose. Some of you can, for some of you have been studying Botany here. I have to look stupidly upon the total beauty of this lovely object; I can see it only as a whole, but you, fine observer, who have trained your powers to penetrate into it, you can go to its very structure and can see how exquisitely the blooming thing is put together. My eyes were dulled to that long ago; I cannot observe it. Beware, do not let yourselves grow dull. Observe, observe! observe in every direction! Keep your eyes open. Go forward, understanding that the world was made for your knowledge; that you are to enter into it and possess it.

And the second rule grows directly out of this one. It is, *Sympathize with that which lies beyond you*; sympathize, I say, with that which lies beyond you. It is easy to sympathize with that which lies within you. How many persons there are who pass through life sympathizing with themselves all the time! What unhappy persons! how unfit for anything whatever! They are full of themselves, and answer their own motion. But there beyond them lies all the beautiful world, in which they might have a share. For sympathy is feeling with; it is identify-

ing yourself with that which at present is not yourself; it is claiming your own. It is going forth and joining yourself with many, not standing off and merely observing, as I said at first. When we observe, the object we observe is different from us; when we sympathize, we identify ourselves with it. You may go into your home and observe, and you will make every person in that home wretched. But go into a home and sympathize with it, find out what lies beyond you there, see how differently those persons are thinking and feeling from the ways in which you are accustomed to think and feel, and yet see how their modes of thinking and feeling supplement your own, that you are imperfect as you stand, and that it is necessary that persons should be constituted thus different from yourself if even your own completion is to come; then, I say, you will soon become large in yourself, and a large benefactor to others. Do not stunt sympathy; do not allow walls to rise up and shut you around. Never say to yourself: "This is my way; I don't do so and so. I know only this and that; I don't want to know anything else. Oh, yes; you other people can have that habit, but these are my habits, and I always do thus and thus." Don't say that.

There is nothing more immoral than moral psychology. You ought to have no interest in yourself as you stand, because a larger selfhood lies beyond you, and you should be going forth and claiming your heritage there. Don't stand apart from the movements of the country, the political movements, however distastefully they may strike you. Identify yourself with them, sympathize with them ; they always have a noble side ; seek it out and claim it as your own. Throw yourself into all life and make it noble.

But I am afraid it would be impossible for you thus to observe, thus to sympathize, unless, thirdly, you bring within you some grounds of self-respect. You must bring to things if you would draw from things. You must already have acquired some sort of excellence in order to detect a larger excellence. You must have something which you can do, and do, on the whole, better than anybody else can do it. That is the moral aspect of competition, that one person can do a certain thing best, and so it is given him to do. Some of you are going out into the world before long, and I am sure you will be much astonished to find that the world is already full ; it has no place for you ; it never

thought about your coming into it, and it has provided no corner for you. The only way you will find a corner will be by doing something better than the people who are already there. Then they will make a place for you. Now that is what you ought to be devoting yourself to; you ought to be training yourself to do something well, it really does not matter much what it is. Can you make dresses well? Can you cook a good loaf of bread? Can you write a poem? Can you run a typewriter? Can you do anything well? Are you a master somewhere? If you are, the world will have a place for you; and, more than that, you will have grounds to respect yourself. Indeed, what I have been saying this afternoon is that the imperfect thing is only worthy to be respected in its connection with all the rest of life. Do not then say to yourself when you go out, "I know Greek; that is a splendid thing to know: these people whom I am meeting do not know it, and obviously they are of a lower grade than I." That will not be self-respectful, because it shows that you have not understood your proper place. You ought to respect yourself as a part of all. I called this wide world a moment ago your own larger self. It was not too extravagant an

expression. But if we are so to count it, then we must count that particular thing which you are capable of doing as merely your special contribution to the great self. And you must understand that many are making similar contributions. What I want you to feel, therefore, is that splendid conception of mutual helpfulness which St. Paul has set forth, where each of us is performing a special function in the common life, and that life of all is recognized as the divine life, the manifestation of the life of our Father. When you have come to that point, when you have seen in the imperfect a portion, an aspect, of the total, perfect, divine life, then I am not afraid life will be uninteresting to you. Indeed, I would say to every one of you who goes forth from this college, you can count with confidence on a life which shall be vastly more interesting beyond the college walls than ever it has proved here, if you have once acquired this art of penetrating into the imperfect and finding in limited, finite life, the infinite life. "To apprehend thus," Shakespeare tells us, in his own exact fashion,

"To apprehend thus, draws us a profit from all things we see."

Palmer, George Herbert, 1842-1933.

The glory of the imperfect : an address given at the first commencement of the Women's College of Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio 1891 / by George Herbert Palmer. -- Boston : Heath, 1891.

29p. ; 18cm.

"From stenographer's notes, revised by the author."

1. Young women--Conduct of life--Addresses, essays, lectures
2. Baccalaureate addresses. I. Title.

